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ABSTRACT

The second of a planned series of monographs designed to help community groups help themselves, this booklet has been developed to provide neighborhood organizations with an awareness and understanding of communication tools. Communication techniques are offered for the neighborhood grapevine, controlled media, and mass media. Among these are step-by-step suggestions for community meetings and programs, letters, fliers, posters, advertising, news releases, photo captions, deadlines, and public service announcements. (MLF)

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Charting a Planning Course:

A Guide To Communicating The Neighborhood's Message

Methods for local neighborhood organizations to reach their desired audiences.

Foreword

A Guide to Communicating the Neighborhood's Message is the second of a planned series of monographs designed to help community groups help themselves. The series, *Charting a Planning Course*, evolved in response to needs identified through direct involvement of the Council of Educational Facility Planners in community planning efforts during the period 1978-1982.* During these activities, CEFP staff became acutely aware that many community members lacked the vocabulary and basic skills critical to active involvement in the decisions that affected their lives. It also became apparent that such individuals and community groups easily learned and applied such tools when given an opportunity for orientation and explanation.

Of the existing written materials that offer this information, CEFP staff found them either too elaborate (lengthy, technical, and/or multi-subject) or too simplistic (one-two page descriptives) to be of practical value. Therefore, the idea of a series on single topics of concern to community members and groups came into being. The series *Charting a Planning Course* is the result.

We hope these publications are of value to community members and others involved in enhancing the vitality of neighborhoods, and we would welcome suggestions as to future topics. *A Guide to Commmunicating the Neighborhood's Message* has been developed to provide neighborhood organizations with an awareness and understanding of the communication tools that most major businesses and governmental organizations already have and use. The guide can be used to strengthen the position of neighborhood organizations in working within the community as well as to aid neighborhood leaders in achieving community goals.

Good luck in your planning!

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*The other publication in the series is *The Facilitator's Role in Planning*.These monographs and CEFP's involvement in community planning efforts since 1978 are, in part, the result of grants from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. The contents of this publication, however, reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the Mott Foundation, its officers or agents.

CONTENTS

Foreword 4

Introduction 6

I. Communication 8

II. Communication: Techniques

1. Through the Neighborhood Grapevine 11
2. Through Controlled Media 20
3. Through Mass Media 30

III. Postscript 37

Introduction

The core challenge of every neighborhood is to build relations with everyone important to the neighborhood . . .

from residents . . .

to city officials. . .

Cooperative relationships in which each "partner" respects the other, and gives and takes to help nurture the relationship . . . relations that are so strong and positive that when the neighborhood needs help from such a person or institution, it is forthcoming . . .

Such relations cannot come about without effective communication . . .

COM-MU-NI-CA-TION: *the giving, and receiving, of information, signals or messages by talk, gestures, writing, etc.; the passage or way for getting from one place to another.*

Communication is the way we get from one place to another . . . the means we use to join with others to accomplish activities that benefit all of us.

As the definition states,

Communication is . . .

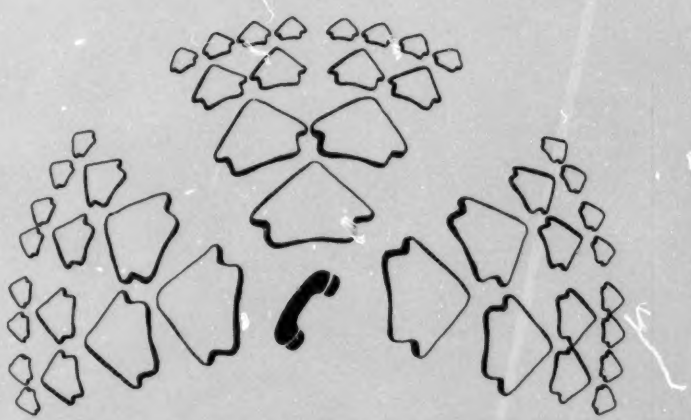
- ***giving and receiving***
  sharing our thoughts, values, knowledge and ideas with others, and encouraging others to do the same with us
- ***information or messages***
  events we are planning to hold . . . beliefs we hold dear . . . interesting items or suggestions we have run across . . . requests that we have. . .
- ***talk, gestures, writing, etc.***
  the ways we present the information we have, or our points of view; the means we use to do so

This guide is about communication, specifically, the systems used in neighborhood communication, for

- What neighborhoods have to say is important

and

- Others probably won't listen unless neighborhoods communicate their message effectively



The Need For Effective Communications

Neighborhood problems or concerns . . .

- city departments ignoring calls for better trash pickup, more police protection, or some maintenance on street lights or alleys
- the school principal brushing off our concerns about the sliding quality of instruction the children appear to be receiving
- merchant after merchant letting the appearance of his or her store drop
- the loud, new neighbors down the block that couldn't care less what we think about the way they are maintaining their home and property
- teenagers harassing older people and our youngsters
- the lack of a "sense of community"

Cannot be resolved by one individual, or one household, or one business, or even public officials, working ALONE.

The support of many individuals, working together, is needed to identify and influence needed or desired neighborhood changes or improvements.

Once we recognize that we cannot solve our problems alone, we recognize the necessity of *neighbor talking to neighbor.*

First we may just walk next door . . . or door to door . . . talking to neighbors. Perhaps we won't always agree on what our most important problems are, or the best ways to solve them . . . but we generally know each other well enough, and see the problems clearly enough, to agree on what problems we share.

We may then begin to organize *block clubs or groups* . . . to collectively work toward resolving some of our concerns. . .but sometimes we will need to organize even more.

The challenge, then, becomes to communicate with all others crucial to addressing our concerns. This does not mean replacement of our tested and effective method of neighbor-to-neighbor communication. It simply means we have to strengthen and build upon that system to create an even larger process of neighborhood communication.

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE WE NEED TO REACH TO RESOLVE OUR CONCERNS?

The answer varies, and often involves many individuals

THE NEIGHBORHOOD CONSTITUENCY:
RESIDENTS
LOCAL BUSINESSES
CITY OFFICIALS

The individuals and institutions that can help or hinder a neighborhood effort

Because we may need many people to correct a neighborhood concern or implement an improvement, we need to establish good, ongoing relationships with these individuals. This, of course, is not always an easy task—especially with the limited time, energy, and resources most of us have to spend. But the task can be made a little easier if we can better understand effective communication and its tools and techniques.

In many ways, neighborhoods and each of our leaders are similar to a legislative body and its elected representatives. The residents look to neighborhood leaders to accomplish things for the neighborhood. Thus leaders must communicate what they are with other members of their constituency. They also need to receive communications from others to find out what they want and how they think such concerns should best be handled.

This guide is designed, therefore, for neighborhood leaders ... all of us, in fact, if we choose to accept that role. The hope is that by taking a little time to be more aware of what it takes to communicate effectively, we all will be better prepared to get our neighborhood's message across ... to train others to work with us to communciate the neighborhood's story, and thereby, to enhance the vitality of our surroundings.

I: Communication

Every communications activity costs time or money or both.

Since both time and money are valuable and often hard to obtain, neighborhood groups need to know which are the most effective communication strategies and when to use them ... that is, the methods that work best for communicating certain messages to specific people or groups.

There are three basic categories of communication:

1. ***Communicating Through the Neighborhood Grapevine***
2. ***Communicating Through Controlled Media***
3. ***Communicating Through Mass Media***

* * *

For neighborhood groups, communicating through the neighborhood grapevine is the most frequent form of communication ... and often the best.

It begins with the one-on-one, neighbor-to-neighbor, face-to-face discussion ...

expands to leaders going door to door to talk with neighbors ... and block club captains talking face-to-face with their neighbors ...

and further expands to include discussions with all of the many people the neighborhood is working with: police, city hall or school officials, news media representatives, state representatives, corporate executives, merchants, and others.

Often it's not necessary to talk in person with someone. The phone can be used. It is wise, however, to meet face-to-face at least once in beginning communications in order to better understand the other's personality, strengths and weaknesses. But by using the phone you can, in effect, go door-to-door and talk one-on-one, and thus help the grapevine grow.

By using a phone network (one person talks to several people who each talk to several people, and so on) you can get the word out to just about everybody in the neighborhood—or those important to a situation—in a matter of hours.

A phone network can also work in reverse to let neighborhood leaders know what the residents think about a certain problem or as a "hotline" for making leaders aware of individual concerns.

There are other ways also to nourish the neighborhood grapevine. Face-to-face communication can occur through:

- scheduled neighborhood meeting(s)—one of the best forms of face-to-face communication
- presentations that take the neighborhood's message to other group meetings
- neighborhood special events—e.g., bake sales, parades, seminars, clean-up days and rallies
- special service programs that a neighborhood organization provides for its residents—actions that speak so much louder than words—e.g., a home repair service for seniors, a babysitting service or a foot-patrolling security force
- distribution of the neighborhood's newsletter and/or neighborhood questionnaires on issues
- neighborhood information centers where residents can come for information, help, or even just fellowship or fun

Face-to-face communication forms the base for everything a neighborhood group does. It starts with the recognition that people's homes might be their castles, but all who live within a neighborhood share a larger "turf" that itself has to be protected and kept a good place to live, work and be.

You know when communication has been effective if an issue important to the residents has made the neighborhood grapevine.

After the spoken word, materials produced by the neighborhood organization should provide the next most important level of communication. These can be controlled by the group. The group decides what it will say, how it will say it, and how and when people will receive the communication.

Controlled media communication provides a neighborhood group with an array of ways to communicate what it would normally say, or would like to say, face-to-face. . .

- You put a sign in a neighborhood store window
- Send a letter to a member of City Council
- Distribute fliers to promote a neighborhood event
- Put bumper stickers on your car
- Publish a neighborhood newsletter
- Sell T-shirts with a neighborhood slogan on them

These kinds of communications are obviously not as personal as face-to-face ones, nor are they as persuasive

. . . but controlled media communication gets the message out so that when you eventually do talk with people, they have seen or heard something that prepares them for your message.

An organization's name . . . it's logo . . . stationery . . . posters . . . advertisements . . .neighborhood bulletin boards . . . signs . . . displays . . . are all examples of controlled media.

Additionally, some neighborhoods are investigating developing their own programs for local cable TV systems and producing films for showing before groups or as short subjects for local movie theaters. A few are even looking at the potential and feasibility of neighborhood low-frequency TV or radio stations that they could own and operate themselves.

The important feature of controlled media is that it allows a neighborhood group to decide what will be said—and how and when communications will occur.

Most information a neighborhood wants to communicate is primarily intended for its most important audience—local residents—and can be accomplished through a combination of spoken and controlled media. But neighborhoods often need to communicate with the public in general, as well as with all of their many residents at one time. This is the role of mass media.

Mass media is simply media controlled by others . . . city newspapers . . . television and radio stations . . . newsletters published by churches, other neighborhood organizations, corporations, . . . etc.

With media controlled by others, the neighborhood organization cannot determine whether its news will even appear in the other's medium . . . or when and in what form it will appear if it does.

In order to get a neighborhood's message communicated through mass media, it is necessary to have "news judgment."

News judgment is that ability to look at what your neighborhood organization is doing in a relatively objective way . . . assessing not how important an event or issue may be to you, but how important it may be to another audience outside of the neighborhood.

The better your organization is in judging what would be of interest to the general public or a large cross-section of people, and in what form the mass media would most likely present it, the more likely the neighborhood group will receive the mass media coverage it seeks.

There are a variety of vehicles a neighborhood organization can use for seeking mass media exposure: news releases ... photo captions ... requests for feature or straight news coverage ... staged events such as publicity stunts or news conferences ... public service announcements for radio and TV stations ... special approaches to talk show producers, newsletter editors, newspaper columnists, radio disk jockeys, and so forth. The important point is:

Know when it is appropriate to seek mass media coverage ... and, when the time is right, go after it in a creative manner.

While mass media exposure may seem glamorous because a neighborhood's story will be told on TV or in the daily newspaper, ***it is very important for neighborhood leaders to keep mass media in perspective, for mass media is just one of the three categories of communications available.***

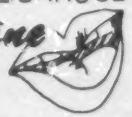
In summary, communicating through the neighborhood grapevine and controlled media will best communicate neighborhood messages. They will be the most effective means for telling a neighborhood's story and for receiving reactions from those most important to the neighborhood--the residents and other influential people with whom the neighborhood cultivates cooperative relationships. Communicating through mass media is best reserved for those occasions when a neighborhood really needs to get its message to the general public or a large cross-section of the population.

We cannot really understand the categories of communication—or use them effectively—unless we understand some of the basic strategies and techniques. It is to these that we now turn.

Although we have divided communication into three categories, it is an interwoven process and thus the suggestions that follow, although they may be included in one of the three categories, are often equally applicable to another.

II: Communication: techniques

1. COMMUNICATING —THROUGH— THE NEIGHBORHOOD Grapevine



Building Relationships

The process of establishing and building relationships with the many individuals and institutions who may be crucial to a neighborhood effort is no one-person job. It is a process that should involve every leader in the neighborhood organization.

To build relationships, each neighborhood leader should be assigned responsibility for one or more organizations. He or she should then seek out individuals within those organizations and establish free-flowing communication with them. Most contacts with an organization should flow through the neighborhood leader responsible for that group.

For example, assume you volunteer to coordinate communications with the local police precinct. If you hadn't already established relations with the precinct, you could begin the process by arranging a time to meet with the precinct commander to introduce yourself and to discuss the role you are now playing for the neighborhood group. You would communicate any major problems or needs of the neighborhood that related to the precinct. The precinct would also know that it could communicate its problems and needs through you to the neighborhood.

By making these contacts you can avoid much of the friction and misunderstanding that may occur among groups. The problem many organizations have in dealing with neighborhood groups is not knowing which leader to deal with. As the officers of the neighborhood group change from year to year, so do the contacts for all organizations trying to work with the neighborhood group. It is therefore helpful to have one person responsible for maintaining communications within a specific group, even if the elected leadership of the neighborhood organization changes. If such an ongoing responsibility occurs, the neighborhood person becomes an expert in understanding particular organizations or businesses.

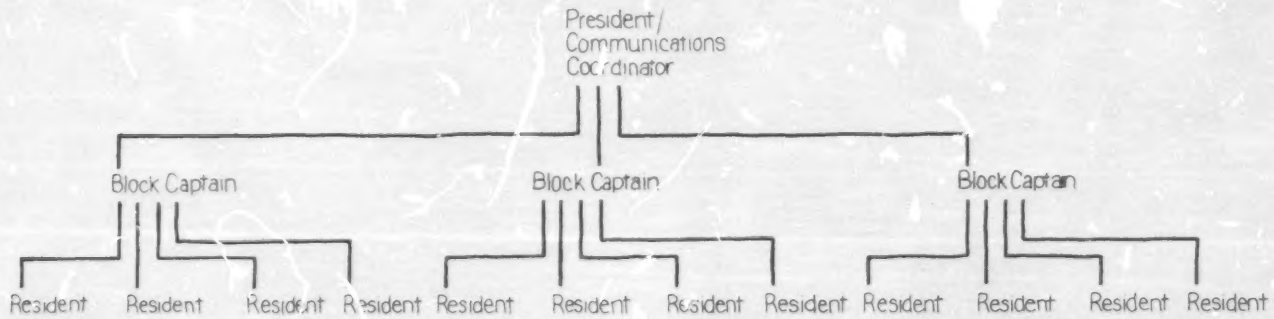
It is unlikely, of course, that a neighborhood association can set up a structure of volunteer contact people for all of the many organizations that affect the local community. It is normally a process that evolves over time as the neighborhood group recognizes the importance of strengthening its relationships with each of the organizations. Volunteer contact people are frequently identified quite naturally because they have had dealings with the organization in the past and feel comfortable in such a role.

Communications Coordinator

While every leader over time coordinates some communications with others, there is the need within most neighborhood organizations for a COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR, spelled with capital "C's." This would be the role for a resident particularly skilled in written and visual communications and publicity.

The Communications Coordinator would be responsible for writing brochures, working with printers on fliers and other printed materials, writing and distributing news releases, and securing media attention. He or she should be experienced in public relations, either as a volunteer or through professional training. The person with either a volunteer or professional background in public relations also would be comfortable as "neighborhood advocate," a role the Communications Coordinator frequently plays.

While the Communications Coordinator would be directly responsible for contacts with the news media, this person also would be responsible for assisting all other leaders and committees in their formal communication activities, such as, preparing written proposals, brochures, speeches and newsletter stories.



Networks/Grapevines/Fan-out Systems

Suppose a neighborhood organization has developed networks of area and block captains to establish quick communication between the officers and each resident. Depending on the size of the neighborhood organization, usually the block captain is responsible for maintaining contact with about a dozen homes and the area captain for approximately six block captains. This allows—through a fan-out system—for the leaders of a neighborhood organization to contact hundreds of residences within hours. This type of network can be used for distributing newsletters, conducting surveys, collecting dues, or relaying phone messages. The network is built on the block captain's familiarity with his/her neighbors and not over-burdening one person with maintaining personal contact with hundreds of people.

Often used by networks, and almost as effective as face-to-face communications, is the phone conversation. A good part of a neighborhood's grapevine is tied together through the phone lines. The phone network is built on the same concept as the grapevine (you talk to several people, who each talk to several more people and so on), but in a structured manner. It starts with one person calling five people, for example, who in turn are assigned five other people to call, who then each call five more, and so on. Thus, in a matter of just a few hours, the entire neighborhood can be contacted.

You can also find out what residents want through the same network. Say you want to find out what residents think about a certain neighborhood problem. The question might be, "Where in the neighborhood do we want the new recreation center located?" In the course of one evening, the network of phone callers can get responses from a large part of the neighborhood.

The process also works in reverse as a sort of "hotline." Assume you're a resident on a block who has a problem. To get action on your problem, you call your block captain who in turn calls his or her leader who may in turn call the president of the neighborhood association or the chairperson of the committee in charge of your area of concern. It is a process that works informally in almost every neighborhood, but this kind of neighborhood "hotline" also has been formalized in many neighborhoods so that residents know the association wants them to call their block club captain with any problems, and the block club captain knows to follow through on the request by calling another leader in the neighborhood association.

If communication is going both ways on the grapevine, everyone is benefiting from it: neighborhood leaders get their messages out and find out what residents think and want, and residents find out current information and funnel their requests into the neighborhood leadership for action as well.

Meetings

Use your agenda as a roadmap to guide discussion. . .not as a structure to limit participation.

A meeting may not be as intimate as a face-to-face discussion, but it does provide a forum for face-to-face dialogue among meeting participants within the room. Do not hold a meeting, however, unless you are really looking for input, for meetings should not be designed simply to report. Other vehicles, such as newsletters, are better for reporting activities.

Whether they're formal neighborhood-wide association meetings, committee meetings, sessions with city officials, gatherings of concerned residents on a particular topic or informal get-togethers in someone's kitchen, the meeting has many of the benefits of both face-to-face communication and the grapevine.

The difficulty most groups have with meetings, especially full association meetings, is that they often get out of control. Everyone has an opinion to express for a different issue to talk about.

Two extreme responses typically occur: the neighborhood leadership keeps the meeting so unstructured that nothing gets accomplished, or it tightens the reins on free discussion and the topics to be discussed so that hardly anyone but the leadership can participate.

In the first instance, the "free-for-all," residents eventually get tired of attending meetings that produce few, if any, results. They get frustrated sitting through hours of random discussions about issues that get sidetracked into other issues before anything gets resolved. Quickly, meeting attendance falls off. The association leadership finds it has difficulty accomplishing neighborhood goals because residents aren't participating in the single most important neighborhood communications activity, the regular association meeting.

The other extreme, the reporting session, is characterized by a tight agenda of issues to be presented. "Presented" is the key word here. Committee chairpeople and other leaders simply report on what they have accomplished over the last month. Very little "audience" discussion is permitted because association leaders are afraid the discussion could get the meeting sidetracked into other issues, turning it into a free-for-all. But quickly, residents tire of being an "audience."

The style many groups are adopting for meetings is one in which an agenda of issues to be discussed is used, but it serves simply as a roadmap to guide discussion and democratic decision making, not as a structure to limit participation. All opinions are invited and encouraged. Respect for the opinions of every person at the meeting is maintained. The primary job of the meeting leader, in this case, is to make sure issues get fully discussed and that no one dominates the meeting.

The primary benefit of a meeting—any kind of meeting—is that it provides an opportunity for every person who plays a role in resolving an issue to get together at the same time. As long as those present respect each other's opinions, an agreement on what should be done to resolve a problem, or take advantage of an opportunity, should be possible.

All too often, though, not all the right people are invited to a meeting on an issue. For example, say a neighborhood would like to start a neighborhood newsletter, but recognizes that advertising support will be needed to pay for it. The group convenes a meeting of residents to discuss how it can solicit advertising. But no local merchants are invited. The residents decide to approach the local merchants, offering to run their ads on yearly contracts at a certain price.

But the price turns out to be too expensive for many merchants, and the yearly contract is unappealing to merchants who would prefer to advertise only at certain times of the year, not in every issue. Quite naturally, the residents are angered by this response. The merchants, in turn, become hostile toward the residents for trying to pressure them into such an arrangement.

The problem might have been avoided had a couple of merchants been invited to participate in the meeting in which the decisions were made.

The basic problem comes down to the very human condition of not liking it when someone else decides what you should do. This applies to neighborhood plans that involve the residents, merchants, local schools, the police, city departments, block clubs, local churches or any other institutions or individuals.

In far too many instances, when a neighborhood group does not involve the affected party in developing a solution that it is expected to play a large role in implementing, the solution doesn't happen. The school says no. The city department says it can't do it. The block club says it won't participate.

To avoid this situation, growing numbers of neighborhood groups are taking advantage of the greatest strength of a meeting: everyone who could play a role in solving a problem is brought together in a meeting to decide—together and in a cooperative manner—what the best solution might be.

Speeches

Speeches are another vehicle used to get the neighborhood's message out. We are defining a speech here as a presentation a neighborhood leader makes before a group other than his or her own. This might include speeches before block clubs, church or school groups, clubs, city commissions or departments, neighborhood groups in other parts of the city, foundations or corporations, or boards or administrative groups.

The only chief reason for a neighborhood leader to be addressing a group is to persuasively communicate the important and positive aspects of the goal or goals of his or her organization—goals that may need the support of the group being addressed to be accomplished.

When the help a group can offer your association is important enough to merit a presentation before one of its meetings, respect for the group dictates that the speech be well prepared and delivered by an association member who is skilled in public speaking.

Every neighborhood association will have several members who have both the knowledge of subject matter and the ability to speak before groups of people.

Some will be able to speak "off the tops of their heads," others will work best from outlined notes and still others will have to write out every word of their speech. What matters is that you send out speakers who are persuasive and knowledgeable in championing the objectives of your neighborhood and recruiting others in supporting them.

Deciding which groups your organization should speak before should be approached in much the same manner as deciding who to invite to a particular meeting. You want to speak before any group that could help you achieve a certain goal, whether your goal is solving a particular neighborhood problem, taking advantage of an opportunity or recruiting another support group for the general welfare of the neighborhood.

Invitations to address other groups come to those who ask. You've got to find out who is in charge of meetings for a group. You then meet with, call or write that person requesting the speaking engagement. You will want to phrase your request in terms of the benefits for that group in hearing you speak. What you have to say to that group has to be of interest to them.

In many cases, the groups approached by you won't be interested in having you address one of their meetings, just as your organization would not be interested in hearing everyone speak who wanted to do so. But there will be groups who want to hear what your organization has to say.

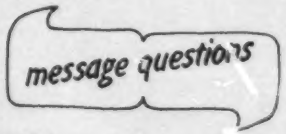
And with each speaking engagement, you will be strengthening that bridge of cooperation between your organization and the group you address, opening up those lines of communication and assistance that could be very important now or in the future.

Question & Answer Sessions

Nine out of ten questions people ask are seeking something other than information.

Research has shown that this "something" people are seeking is recognition, stimulation or a demonstration that they're "one-up" on the person called upon to answer.

Based upon what motivates questioners, questions can be classified into three categories: "Message" questions, "Gotcha" questions and "Answer-Seeking" questions.



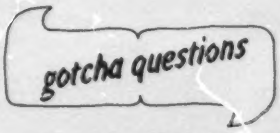
A message question is one in which the asker is using a question to present an idea, state a conviction or share information.

Sometimes message questions are statements without the raised tone of voice that signals a question. Program moderators try to guard against message questions when they say, "No statements, only questions." Then message senders usually react with more skillful phrasing of what they have to say, turning it into a question.

Message questions begin with phrases such as, "Don't you think . . . Have you ever considered . . . Since . . . What would happen if . . ."

The asker of the message question is looking for affirmation of his position or idea. Message questions account for about 45 percent of questions asked.

An effective way to deal with the message question is to agree with it, thereby "stroking" or affirming the asker. When the idea or opinion is unacceptable, it is important to personally recognize the asker in some way. For example, you might say, "I sense that you have given this a great deal of thought and have some feelings about it. I share your concern, and my thinking is. . ."



The "gotcha" question is used to reveal a blemish in the speaker or his position. The goal of the gotcha question is to be "one-up" by making the sender appear inadequate or react with anxiety, embarrassement, guilt or anger.

The "gotcha" questioner is trying to toss somebody else his or her "hot potato" of anger, fear or woe. And people who catch the hot potato may change it from anger to anxiety or get angry themselves.

"Gotcha" questions often begin with "Why" or "How come," and they are estimated to account for another 45 percent of questions asked.

"Gotcha" questions are a kind of game. Because games are predictable, it is not necessary to become defensive and fall into the trap set by the questioner. There are a variety of ways of dealing with these "hot potatoes."

One way of dealing with them is to admit the failing, yours or someone else's, and say "You got me" or "You're right." Admitting that the "gotcha" questioner is correct depends, of course, upon whether the facts support the questioner, and whether it's appropriate to say so. Once you've acknowledged the "gotcha" player and his point without hostility, there aren't many places left for him to go.

You can also disarm a "gotcha" player by saying, "I give up," or by asking a disarming question.

Another way to deal with a "gotcha" player is to redefine the question in terms of a message that you want to get

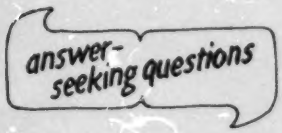
across. This is especially important in the "When-did-you-stop-beating-your-wife" question. Anticipate this question, have in mind the message you want to convey, and don't restate the accusation of the questioner.

With an angry person, you can also find something in his enthusiasm to "stroke." You may have to continue stroking throughout the dialogue that so often ensues.

Another technique is to agree and disagree. Agree with part of the point being made, and then disagree by presenting factual evidence, differences of opinion or your own feelings.

Sometimes—although only when you're extremely confident and the audience is with you and against him—you will need to confront the "gotcha" questioner by asking, "Are you trying to start a fight with me?" or by asking the "gotcha player" to talk with you about what's really bothering him or her.

In dealing with "gotcha" questions, it's important to stay in the "here and now." Reliving the past is the communication equivalent of walking into a mine field.



The answer-seeking question is the only one in which the questioner is truly looking for an answer. The answer being sought may be facts, opinions or the sharing of feelings. Answer-seeking questions are estimated to account for only about one of ten questions asked.

Questions beginning with "How" are often answer-seeking. As a rule in answering, make your most important point first, and then list your reasons for this conclusion in descending order of importance.

Special Events

Recognizing that a neighborhood organization's most powerful communication tool is the spoken word, most neighborhood organizations rely heavily on special events to bring people together to socialize and discuss neighborhood business.

Special events for a neighborhood group can range anywhere from block parties to parades, neighborhood picnics, seminars, clean-up days, skating parties, carnivals or demonstrations.

While the primary purpose for a particular event might be anything from cleaning up neighborhood alleys to recruiting members, or just having a good time. . .the underlying purpose for every special event is to strengthen the neighborhood's sense of community.

Special events allow neighbors to get to know each other better, to strengthen their feelings of kinship with each other, while they deal with the attraction of the special event, whether it be educational, social or neighborhood service-oriented.

Even organizing a special event helps address that underlying goal of bringing the community closer together. One person does not single-handedly put on a special event. As many residents as possible should be recruited to work together to assist with the various jobs.

When appropriate, groups outside of the neighborhood should be invited to participate in special events. They can get a much better feeling for the personality of your neighborhood at a neighborhood carnival or block club party than they would at a meeting or from listening to one of your leaders address their group. Similarly, your issues-oriented special events, such as seminars and rallies, can provide them with an indepth understanding of how specific issues are perceived by your residents.

You also get to know them in a much more human way. The way city officials, bank officers, merchants or community leaders act at a neighborhood picnic will probably be quite different from the way they act in normal business encounters.

Similarly, by promoting a neighborhood parade or carnival, for example, you may be exposing the special qualities of your neighborhood to many prospective residents.

Special Programs

The primary reason for a special neighborhood program is to address a significant resident need, but special programs also provide essential communication lines between residents and the organization.

Examples of special programs a neighborhood organization might run include: minor home repair service for seniors provided by residents skilled in home repair, inexpensive babysitting service provided by seniors or non-working residents for working mothers, a foot-patrolling security force of young neighborhood men and women and older teens, a driving service for seniors and the handicapped provided by neighborhood residents or food co-op buying programs for residents.

These kinds of special programs are concrete actions by the neighborhood organization that speak so much more loudly than words. They provide an ongoing means for keeping the communication lines open between residents and the neighborhood organization. The young are helping the old, who in turn are helping the young. Neighbor is helping neighbor, which is exactly what a neighborhood organization is supposed to do.

Special programs keep open face-to-face communication channels among residents as they help other residents. Communication flows better among those who know each other.

Surveys

It's not always possible for neighborhood organizations to communicate face-to-face with residents, at least not all residents. Most residents in a neighborhood probably don't attend meetings, talk regularly with their block club captains at any length or attend special events, nor do they participate in every special program the neighborhood organization operates or talk on the phone with other residents very often.

How do you find out what these, as well as more active, residents think about things or how they feel about certain problems the neighborhood is encountering? You have to ask them.

Leaders of a neighborhood organization are accountable to the residents in much the same way elected city or state officials are accountable to their constituents. While you may hold your elected or appointed position with the neighborhood group basically because nobody else wanted it, or you earned it through past efforts for the neighborhood, you still have the responsibility to find out what residents want and how they feel about what the neighborhood organization is or is not doing.

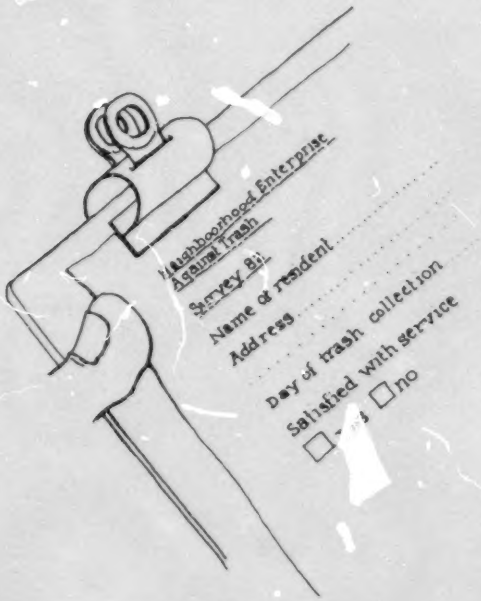
In many ways, while your neighborhood may be crowded into a large urban center, it is very much like a small town. Your neighborhood association has assumed the responsibilities of a town council that should be trying to make sure the needs of the "town's" residents are being served.

You don't have the money a town council would have, nor do you control city departments in their delivery of services to residents, but residents still expect the neighborhood association to speak for them in making sure city services are delivered to the neighborhood in the proper manner and that neighborhood problems get solved.

Most neighborhood leaders know what most of their residents want. But needs change, and methods to keep up on what residents want need to be employed by neighborhood organizations.

The residents your organization has the greatest difficulty in communicating with may also be apathetic to your organization because they don't think it is doing anything that benefits them. Whether they're right or wrong, there should be a way to find out what these non-involved residents are thinking.

It comes down to periodically asking all residents, or as many as possible, what they think.



A few standard questions can be agreed upon by the neighborhood organization to be asked of residents. The asking, or surveying, of residents can be done in a number of ways. Volunteers can man the phones and ask residents the questions, writing down their answers. Block club captains can go from door to door, filling in the answers at each stop. Or the questions can be printed and mailed to the residents for them to fill out and send back to the neighborhood organization.

Whatever form of surveying is used, you just add up all of the "yes" and "no" responses to see how the community feels about each issue.

Suppose you learn that neighborhood residents think one of the most important things the neighborhood organization should be doing is providing seniors with transportation on a regular basis. If the neighborhood organization already has such a program in place, this survey finding may indicate that the neighborhood organization needs to communicate the existence of its program for seniors more widely. If such a program is not in operation, the neighborhood organization has found out that residents—its members—think it is one of the most important things the neighborhood organization should be doing. Its decision as to whether or not to establish such a program has a community vote behind it.

Such formal surveys offer a double-check on the information that has been flowing into the neighborhood organization through all of the other vehicles of communications it employs: face-to-face, phone, meeting, special events, special programs and block captain or information center communications.

2. COMMUNICATING THROUGH—— Controlled media

The starting point for all communications controlled by a group should be the group's name. Name recognition is at the root of all the group hopes to accomplish.

Most groups have a name that is long-standing or that has evolved from popular usage. With many neighborhood groups, of course, the group invented a name for itself and the neighborhood it served.

While many might argue to the contrary, it is highly unlikely that there is any such thing as a "bad" name when the name is popularly used by residents and others to refer to a neighborhood or a neighborhood organization.

But it has become popular of late for groups to question the appropriateness of their organization's name. They might have a name like, "Third-Beaumont-Haverhill Community Organization" or an acronym such as "AWARE." They look longingly at other names that seem to exhibit more of a sense of community, like "Russell Park" or "Sherwood Forest." They wish their neighborhood had a name like one of those. But to try to invent such a name—and get it popularly accepted and used by residents and others—is a long-term endeavor. In most instances, a new name is not accepted because it was invented, and there is no tradition behind it. As long as your organization has a name that is accepted and recognizable, stick with it.

Logo

Whatever your organization's name might be, it should be presented in printed materials the same way every time. It should have what is called a logo.

A logo is the printing of your organization's name using the same type face every time. You may have noticed that the names of products you buy are always printed in a consistent manner. The type face used for "Campbell's Soup" or "Pepsi" is always the same. Their logos provide instant recognition of their names because they are distinctive and look the same every time.

The treatment of your organization's name on stationery, posters, banners, bumper stickers and whatever else you produce should always be the same so people can instantly recognize your organization's name and that the communication is coming from you.

A logo can be developed for your organization's name by a local artist or a neighborhood printer. Generally, several logo designs are developed from which the group can select. While you want a logo that is attractive and easy to read, the choice of the "look" that is right for your group is really a matter of taste. So choose and use one you like best.

And use it you will ... on everything from stationery to signs to banners to your newsletter to bumper stickers to T-shirts. It should be displayed very visibly on all communications your organization controls.

Stationery

The first printed piece that is likely to display your logo is your organization's stationery. Again, a neighborhood printer can help the group design and print the stationery.

And every organization should have stationery. For many, there is no choice involved. They have a tradition of sending many letters on behalf of the organization. Other organizations may never send letters; they do everything in person or over the phone.

But the more active a neighborhood group becomes, the more likely that it will be writing letters to city officials, to the news media, to merchants, to money-granting organizations and others.

You certainly don't need letterhead stationery to send a letter; plain paper can obviously carry the message. But letterhead stationery gives substance to the organization and its message. The impression city officials receive when opening a letter on stationery is that the group is organized, and the writer of the letter is speaking for all of the members of the group. They are much more likely to pay attention to such a communication because the letterhead gives it the official status of your neighborhood.

Letters

Letterwriting should be an important part of your organization's communication efforts. A letter is an accepted method for initially contacting people in business or government. Trying to get people on the phone is frequently a frustrating and time-consuming effort when they don't recognize your name. A letter sent in advance of your phone call lets them know whom you represent and what you want.

Similarly, after you have talked with someone about a neighborhood problem or need, a letter restating what you said over the phone or in person, and what the two of you agreed to, does document that conversation. You can always refer to the letter later if the action you both agreed to does not occur.

Often you may want to approach many different people or organizations with the same request. For example, you may want to invite four different news media outlets to an event in your neighborhood, or you may wish to speak before eight neighboring community group meetings. Though you call them all, a letter gives you the opportunity to present your case exactly the way you want to present it. Where a phone call from you may be answered by a person at the height of his work day, or right after he got in an argument with a co-worker—leaving him in no state of mind to be courteous to you or to hear you out—a letter can sit on a desk until the person has time to read it and consider it properly.

Of course, many organization leaders may be uncomfortable with their writing skills. But in most organizations there is

a member who is quite skilled at the written word. Many neighborhood leaders rely on one or two such members to write all official letters for the group. They realize that the person receiving the letter is often well educated and may be prejudiced against a letter's request if it is poorly written. Rather than take the chance that their poor writing skills might jeopardize the potential success of the letter, they recruit a good writer to help them put their thoughts into words.

Fliers

Just as you may wish to send the same letter to several different people because you want to offer each the exact same thing, a neighborhood group regularly needs to send many people that kind of communication. To type the same letter 100 times is rarely a reasonable idea. (Although you may wish to communicate in a very personal manner with 100 state officials, and a personally typed letter may be very appropriate.) Butwhen typing a letter 100 times is not reasonable, you type it once, address it "dear friend" or "dear neighbor," and take it to a neighborhood printer for reproduction. You are, in effect, having a flier produced.

You may have 100 copies of your letter reproduced, send out 80 through the mails, hand out some at meetings, and post the rest on store windows or bulletin boards.

But frequently, the information you need to communicate on a flier can be said in just a few words. You don't need to write a letter to invite people to a neighborhood meeting on a specific issue at a certain time and place. All you need to present on this flier is that information, and maybe a couple of sentences describing the meeting. For this kind of flier, you might have a neighborhood artist or the local printer hand-letter or typeset these few words in large type to be neatly arranged on the paper for reproduction.

Maybe the artist thinks a drawing or photograph added to the flier might help tell your story more fully. But with or without art, you want the flier to be capable of communicating your information at a glance. You want it to be able to attract attention immediately so people will read what it has to say.

Frequently, one side of a sheet is just not enough space to adequately communicate all of the information you wish the flier to carry. Since you control this communication vehicle, you may decide to use the back side.

Generally speaking, fliers that are put together quickly look nice but not great, and are inexpensively printed. They fold easily for mailing or for use as inexpensive brochures. You can use fliers as you would a poster. You also could print a flier in a church or neighborhood newsletter as an advertisement.

Posters

The differences between a poster and flier are slight. Generally, a poster would be printed on stiffer paper, and more artistic attention would be devoted to its appearance. You generally wouldn't send a poster through the mail. In many instances, in fact, the poster and flier look the same; the only difference is the paper on which they're each printed.

Because you would be using heavier paper for a poster, the cost would be somewhat higher than a flier. Besides cost, the decision whether to produce a poster may rest on evaluating how long your message might be displayed. If it is going to be posted for a relatively long time, it might be a good idea to spend the extra money for the sturdiness the heavier paper brings.

If, for example, a poster is promoting a neighborhood hotline number that is going to be available to residents for a long time, you want to post posters, not fliers, so you won't have to replace tattered fliers on bulletin boards every week. Unless it is handled frequently, a poster on a bulletin board or in a store window should look good for quite a long time.

Advertisements

Assume you have produced an attractive flier that you also had printed as a poster. It tells your story in a few words and is compellingly illustrated with a photograph or art work. It looks so good you feel it would also make an attractive ad.

Or maybe the event or service you wish to promote is so important to your neighborhood, you think that advertising might be the best way to get the word out. But you feel that because of the cost of advertising, a small ad should be produced by your organization. So you have your local artist or printer make one up for you.

With advertising, of course, you've got to pay for the space.

And it's not like sending out news releases, where you might send the release to a dozen publications.

With advertising, you've got to decide to whom you want to communicate through the ad.

Suppose you feel you've got your neighborhood pretty well covered through all of the other communications techniques you've used to promote your event: face-to-face, speeches before local groups, mention in your newsletter, fliers and posters, and a lot of stimulation of the neighborhood grapevine. But you realize you haven't communicated to residents of neighboring areas very well, and you want them to participate.

The larger neighborhood may be fortunate in having a weekly newspaper serving it, for example. That would make identification of where to advertise relatively easy. Suppose an ad in that newspaper the size you would need cost $100. You only had a $150 budget, $100 of which was already spent on printing the fliers and posters, and sending out news releases and public service announcements.

You have some choices here. You might approach your local merchant association or a larger retailer in your neighborhood. Your event may carry some benefits for these local merchants. You could ask them to carry for the full cost of the ad. Your step-down from here, of course, would be to offer to split the cost of the ad with the merchants.

You might also approach the newspaper to see if it would donate the space. Most will not, but a public-spirited newspaper might, particularly if you had cultivated close relations with the newspaper over the years. And again, of course, the step-down here would also be trying to arrange a split in the cost of the ad.

Failing all of these approaches, you can always reduce the size of your ad to the amount of space your $50 will purchase.

For a neighborhood organization, the controlled communications vehicle of advertising doesn't always have to cost money. Newsletters published by neighborhood organizations such as PTA's, service clubs and churches may be willing to run small ads prepared by your association regularly for free. You could prepare a small ad inviting residents of your neighborhood to join your association by calling a certain number or writing for information. Your printer could produce copies of the ad for those publications in your neighborhood that had agreed to run the ad for you.

A very active merchant or the merchant association may also pay for the cost of advertising your association occasionally. After all, the vitality of your neighborhood is essential to the vitality of their businesses.

Bulletin Boards

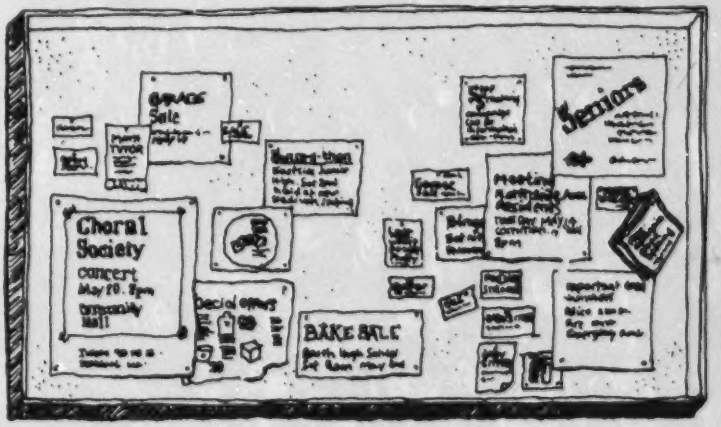
A neighborhood organization has to be careful how it spends its money. Advertising, if the association has to pay for it itself, can be a very expensive communications vehicle. However, there are many other vehicles of low or no cost available to the group, one of which is the bulletin board.

Your flier or poster could be considered an ad, and the bulletin board is a vehicle the public encounters just like it encounters a newspaper. In a newspaper, your ad has to "compete" for attention with many other ads and stories. On a bulletin board, your flier or poster similarly is competing for attention with everything else that is displayed. This competition for attention should indicate that great care should be taken to make your fliers and posters visually attractive and easy to read.

You should take care to find out where your neighborhood bulletin boards are located just as you would find out what your local publications are. Locations of bulletin boards could include schools, churches, community centers, libraries, apartment buildings, grocery and other stores, police and fire stations, human and health services offices and government offices. Store windows also should be considered bulletin boards. Not all merchants will agree to your use of their window space, but many will; it's up to your organization to find out who will let you use these glass "bulletin boards."

Your neighborhood organization should try to find a location for a bulletin board of its own. The group then could display all of the information about its efforts and events it desires. A neighborhood organization's own bulletin board, if it is in a location where many people go, can serve as a sort of stationary newsletter for the organization.

But someone within the organization has to agree to maintain that bulletin board regularly. The information displayed on the bulletin board should be arranged in an attractive manner, and fliers or notices of events already completed should be quickly removed to keep the information current.



Newsletters

Newsletters published by neighborhood groups range anywhere from typed single sheets printed on both sides at little cost, to multi-colored, many-paged, "slick" publications with photographs and advertising printed at substantial cost. One can't be considered a "better" newsletter than the other.

The most important factor to consider when evaluating a neighborhood group's newsletter is whether people are reading it.

The purpose of a neighborhood organization newsletter is to communicate regularly to residents and others important to the neighborhood. If a typed single sheet does the job, nothing larger or more sophisticated may be needed. Whether it's a "one-pager" or a sophisticated publication, it has to be produced regularly and it must get into people's hands in a timely manner.

Three people—and sometimes a fourth person—are essential to the success of a newsletter: (1) the editor, (2) the printer, (3) the person in charge of distribution, and, possibly, (4) a person in charge of selling advertising.

The editor is in charge of keeping up on what the neighborhood organization is doing so each newsletter reports on the current work of the association. The editor also has to develop a means for gathering information from around the neighborhood. This could range anywhere from reporting on problems residents are having, on new people moving into the neighborhood or on special programs or services available to residents and others in the neighborhood. Block club captains can make good reporters for the editor. And just as your neighborhood organization wants local church bulletins and service club newsletters to publish your news, these organizations will probably want to see their news in your newsletter. In many urban neighborhoods, the neighborhood association newsletter—whether it is published monthly or quarterly—is the equivalent of the local weekly newspaper because there is no local newspaper serving the neighborhood.

A good local printer should be able to work with the editor to help convert the stories and pictures the editor has compiled into an attractive publication. The printer can typeset the stories, reproduce pictures, set up the pages and print the publication. But a printer should not be expected to do this for free.

Many printers have relationships with companies or organizations who can distribute the newsletter, such as, a Boy or Girl Scout troop, a distributing company or a shopper newspaper that would allow the newsletter to be inserted for its distribution. With any of these sources, there would be a cost for distribution.

Delivering the monthly newsletter can be a good reason for block club captains to visit their neighbors. This strengthens their position with their neighbors as the block's representative to the larger neighborhood association.

Publishing a neighborhood newsletter can be very expensive, so selling advertising should not be overlooked. Volunteers can sell advertising, but it can be a very time-demanding activity. It's not just convincing a merchant to advertise, it often involves helping the merchant word his ad and illustrate it. And probably every month, that merchant will have to be met with to discuss the coming month's ad. With some merchants, several sales calls will be required over many months to secure a sale. Many neighborhood organizations are finding that unemployed or retired residents, working on a commission, do a more thorough job of selling ads than do volunteers. For them, it can be an important source of income.

Since a neighborhood newsletter may be the only "newspaper" serving the neighborhood, local merchants may find it a

particularly attractive advertising medium for their stores. An ad in the neighborhood newsletter can be a good business decision, not just a charitable contribution. After all, the best customers for most neighborhood merchants are located in the immediate neighborhood. For a local hardware store, an ad on television, radio or in the daily newspaper is a poor investment when the majority of the store's customers and prospective customers live right in the neighborhood, not on the other side of town.

Of course, the newsletter might not be just for residents. A neighborhood association is attempting to cultivate good relations with a broad range of people and institutions in the city. The monthly newsletter might be the one, regular opportunity for communication with these people every month. Surprisingly, few neighborhood organizations think to add these people to their newsletter distribution list.

Signs

In communicating with residents, people passing through or visiting the neighborhood and people who work in the neighborhood, the physical structures of the neighborhood present controlled communications opportunities to the neighborhood group through the variety of signs that can be displayed.

The neighborhood group has its logo and maybe a slogan or descriptive phrase that makes a strong statement about the neighborhood, bringing a sense of community to the front. How can a neighborhood group's message be encountered as people move around the neighborhood?

Small signs or stickers can be produced by the neighborhood association for display by merchants and other neighborhood institutions in their windows.

If bumper stickers for the association were made available to residents and others for little or no cost to them, many would display them on their cars.

The same goes for T-shirts. Young people and children, in particular, are used to wearing printed T-shirts. They not only become walking billboards for the neighborhood, but many feel a closer tie with their neighborhood from this association with what they wear on their chests.

A few, inexpensive banners might be made by volunteers for use at meetings and special events held throughout the year.

A permanent street sign carrying the name of the neighborhood and a welcome to drivers often can be arranged with the city. It not only tells people that they're in a certain neighborhood, it helps define that neighborhood geographically for residents, just like a sign as you enter a small, rural town helps define that town.

Bus stop benches in many cities carry advertising. When there is no paying advertiser on a bench, the advertising company might be willing to display your painted sign on its benches in your neighborhood in the interim.

The same holds true for commercial billboards along your business strips. When they're empty, why can't group have use of them?

Many side walls of stores also lend themselves for use as either neighborhood billboards or walls for beautifying graphics. Many building owners would welcome the attention-grabbing effect of an attractive graphic on the side of their building. Neighborhood artists could be hired or recruited as volunteers to design the graphic and to oversee the work of neighborhood youth in painting it on the wall. Neighborhood youth should be involved in painting such a graphic for two reasons: they are given a greater sense of being part of your neighborhood, and they are much less likely to scrawl or allow graffitti on their art work.

Signs—whether they be these ideas, buttons, flags or other types of physical signs—can be a permanent, ongoing, controlled communication outlet that can become part of the landscape of your neighborhood, one that can help define both the geography and spirit of your area.

Displays

A neighborhood group often has the opportunity to set up a display, either in conjunction with a speaking engagement before a group, one of its own meetings, a church bazaar, a city-wide meeting of neighborhood leaders, or a special invitation from a church or recreation center. Sometimes it's just for a couple of hours, a day or a week.

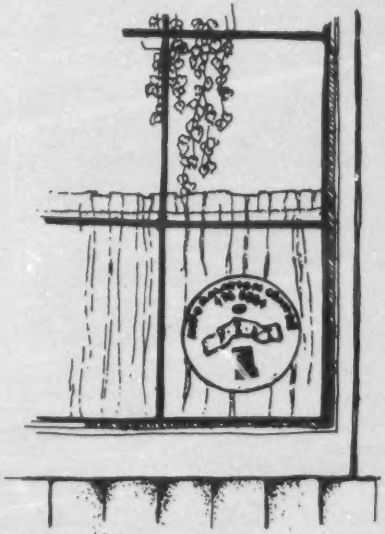
Such an opportunity allows the neighborhood to illustrate its personality in a very visual way.

To be prepared for these opportunities, many neighborhood groups build simple panels of pictures, newsletters and fliers that can easily be carried to be set up on tables. These displays generally are designed so that pictures or other exhibits can be changed or rearranged.

Information Center

Whether housed in a church, a storefront, the back room of an involved merchant's shop, a neighborhood leader's house or in the local elementary school, a neighborhood information center can supplement and enhance the face-to-face efforts of your other communication activities. The establishment of an information center assumes, of course, that no other institution has established such a facility in your neighborhood.

The center could have materials and information not only on your neighborhood organization but on the services of as many organizations in town as you could gather. It could be the place residents would know they could come for direction in dealing with the many personal difficulties people face in life.



Information on services offered by health care organizations, human services agencies and government agencies and departments, as well as the neighborhood organization itself, should be available there. In addition to its obvious potential for helping residents, an information center provides the neighborhood organization with another way to communicate with residents, and it strengthens relations with the wide variety of organizations that are providing service to the people who live in your area.

Cable TV

While it generally might be considered "mass media"—media someone else controls—cable TV must allow groups in the community it serves to produce their own shows on its "public access" channel.

If a neighborhood is served by a cable television service, there are a variety of communication opportunities available to the group.

The neighborhood group could broadcast its newsletter by producing its own neighborhood news show. You could take video cameras out into the neighborhood and film interviews and stories.

The neighborhood group could broadcast its monthly meeting, a service that might be very appealing to people who could not physically attend the meeting.

A neighborhood group also could produce special shows on whatever topics it desired, whether they be home improvement, crime prevention or discussion of an issue important to the neighborhood.

Similarly, the neighborhood group could produce its own public service announcements for broadcast on the cable TV outlet. The tapes could be purchased by the group for use with conventional TV stations in the city.

The cable TV company will provide all the training your volunteer residents require so they know how to work the equipment. The use of the equipment, as well as the broadcast time, is free to community groups.

Film

With production facilities available through cable companies, a neighborhood group could produce its own films for showing at meetings or with displays. Converting videotape to film does cost money, and some of the quality of the picture is lost, but such free access and training now puts film within the reach of neighborhood people.

And you are much more likely to be successful in communicating your message if you use film rather than print. While people do read, they are more accustomed to receiving information through film.

Movie Theaters

The ability to produce films also raises another communications possibility. A short message on the neighborhood could be produced at the cable company, converted into film, and offered to local movie theater operators. If it was professionally produced, many theater operators might consent to run it for every audience that comes into the theater. A length of 30 to 60 seconds would probably be proper for such use.

Low-Frequency TV Stations

Though there is great competition for licenses to operate them, and substantial cost involved for a neighborhood group, a new controlled communication vehicle available to neighborhood groups is the low-power television station or LPTV.

Designed as an alternative to major TV stations, a low-power TV station could be started by a neighborhood group for as little as $10,000 to serve a radius of 10 to 15 miles, which would represent a good-sized neighborhood. The Federal Communications Commission, the regulatory body overseeing LPTV licenses, says it will give preference for licenses to minority groups.

A neighborhood group—if it could secure an LPTV license and the necessary finances to operate the station—could go cable one better: it could have its own neighborhood TV station. You might have programming that ran just a couple of hours every night or you might broadcast all day. Advertising could be sold to local merchants to help defray the cost of operation. The neighborhood group would decide what kinds of programs were broadcast.

But since there are substantial costs and manpower involved in operating such a station, a neighborhood would have to seriously weigh the advantages of LPTV over cable for its own special needs. If properly operated, of course, such a neighborhood TV station also could be the source of jobs for residents.

Neighborhood Radio Station

A similar opportunity exists for operating a neighborhood radio station. Such low-frequency radio stations that transmit only to a very small area have long been present in high schools and colleges. They're appearing in a growing number of urban neighborhoods across the country.

Information on how to get a license from the FCC, what kind of equipment would be needed and its cost could be investigated through a friendly local radio station or directly with the FCC.

The same opportunities for programming and advertising revenue exist with a neighborhood radio station as would exist with a neighborhood LPTV station, as well, of course, as the costs and manpower requirements of operating such an enterprise.

As is evident, an enormously wide range of communication vehicles a neighborhood organization could control itself are available. Each group has to decide what it can handle with its available volunteer workers and monies and what's appropriate for and needed in its neighborhood.

3.

Your neighborhood association decides to stage a Gay '90s festival with all the trappings. It's the first time it's ever been done in the city.

You do a perfect job in adding all the right touches, in mixing into the day every conceivable element to make the event a compelling attraction.

You promote the festival at association meetings, in newsletters, with posters in every church, business and public facility in the area. Everyone in the neighborhood is talking about it for weeks ahead of time.

A couple of weeks before the festival, your publicity chairperson sends a one-page news release to the dailies and area weeklies, television and radio stations.

About 1,000 neighborhood residents have a great time at the Gay '90s festival. But the event was geared for 5,000 people, most of whom were to have been attracted from outside the area.

None of the media ran your news release, even though you called and begged and argued with them, and the biggest neighborhood retailer pressured the ad sales people who called on him to push the story through. Afterwards, your embarrassed and angry publicity chairperson sends "poison pen" letters to every medium that had been sent the news release. And at the next association meeting, everyone griped about the negative news media that won't give any coverage to positive news, especially neighborhood news.

This hypothetical scenario, a bit extreme in some details, illustrates both the strongest and weakest skills of most associations. They are excellent at communicating with their own members, but poor at securing major media attention, and sometimes, even local weekly newspaper coverage.

In most instances, the lack of news coverage has more to do with the association's poor news "judgment," "packaging" and "selling" skills than it has to do with any allegedly biased news media.

The mythical Gay '90s festival had the innovative qualities to be of interest both within the neighborhood and beyond its boundaries. In other words, it was potentially newsworthy.

But the only good promotional work was done at the neighborhood level. There, every communication vehicle available was used.

But with the mass media, just a simple, one-page news release was sent. And who knows if it was well-written or conveyed the interesting qualities of the festival.

Why didn't the publicity chairperson send out several news releases, a pre-event picture and caption, letters to columnists requesting advance coverage or inviting them to the festival? Why weren't the radio and television talk shows approached? Did anyone send out radio and television public service announcements? Were letters and follow-up phone calls made to the newspapers, television and radio news operations soliciting coverage the day of the festival?

Most probably, the publicity chairperson didn't recognize these available mass media communication vehicles or maybe the identities of the media editors, producers and public service directors weren't known. Maybe the chairperson just didn't know how to secure this kind of coverage.

Ground Rules

What is news to your group may not be newsworthy to media outside of your neighborhood. The local weekly newspaper might be interested, but unless there's something special about an event, group action or announcement that would make it interesting to the general public, the daily newspapers, television or radio stations may not consider it newsworthy for their audiences.

Your news is also competing with everybody else's news for space or time in those major media. The space or time is limited, and the volume of "news" bombarding the news rooms is enormous, specifically because everybody wants to get that major coverage.

If for some reason, a daily newspaper published your new officers' slate, your group might achieve some ego-satisfaction, but who else cares, and what real good does it do in furthering your group's goals? The goals of your group are best served in the majority of instances by very local publicity.

But suppose you have an announcement, project or event that is particularly innovative, requires participation or recognition by people or groups outside of your area, or is just so interesting, it deserves major coverage. You don't have to pressure media to cover a good story. You don't have to unleash that large retailer on ad sales people. (Most news media will avoid your story if it comes through the ad department —the news and advertising functions are separate and generally don't cooperate.)

You also shouldn't think that berating editors for not running your material will do anything positive for you and your group. (If your publicity chairperson likes to write "poison pen" letters to "get even" for an apparent slight, get rid of the person; he or she is damaging the reputation of your association with the media.)

And just because you don't have good media "contacts" doesn't put you at any disadvantage in securing news coverage. "Contacts" are one of the great myths of publicity work. An editor will not publish a low-interest story just because he or she knows you. That would be unethical for the news person.

You, however, may feel more at ease if you know the editor, and may, as a result, do a better job of explaining your news story to this person.

If the contact an editor has had with your organization leads him or her to consider your group a trustworthy organization that delivers what it promises, this kind of "contact" will help because the editor will know the release or letter can be trusted.

The key ingredient of sound publicity work is a newsworthy idea, well-written, complete in detail and presented to the media in a professional, usable manner.

News Releases

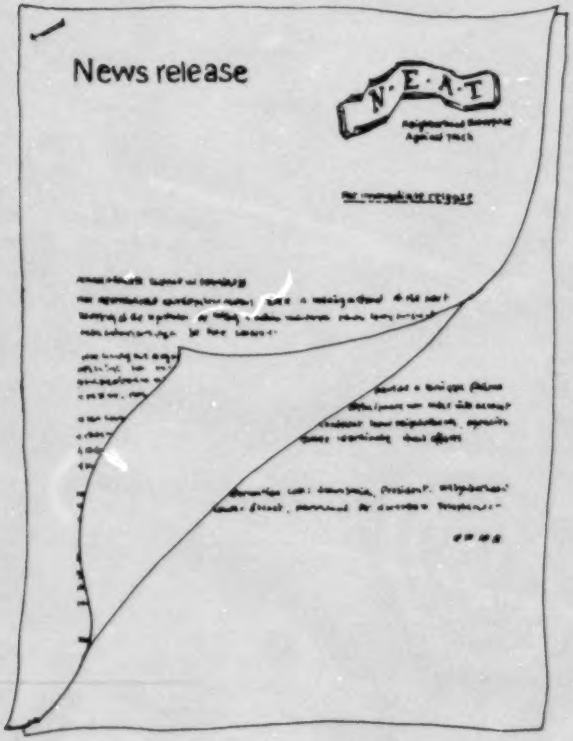
There are five points important to a news release: *Who, What, When, Where* and *Why*. If possible, a sixth, *How*, also should be included.

It is important to get all of these points in the first sentence or two, whether the release is for newspapers or broadcast news outlets. These first two sentences are called the "lead."

A good lead captures the attention of readers or listeners, and makes them want to know more about your group's activity or project.

Following your lead, your release would then move into the details of your story, with each succeeding paragraph presenting information of declining importance.

Be brief. Use short words. Write short sentences and short paragraphs. One or two sentences make a good paragraph in a news release. News releases should be limited to one or two typed double-spaced pages.



When you have finished the draft of your story, go over it and cross out all descriptive adjectives and unnecessary words. Check every point for accuracy. Never guess on dates, time, places or names.

Don't use "Mr.," "Mrs." or "Ms." The first mention of a person would read "Jane Jones," for example; the second mention would be "Jones."

News releases should always be typed, double-spaced, on 8-1/2" by 11" white paper, and photocopied onto your organization's stationery or onto other good-quality white paper. If not using stationery paper, type the name of your organization in the upper left corner of the first page. In the upper right corner, type the name and phone number of the person to be contacted for further information.

Always start typing your story copy at least one-third of the way down the first page to give the editor room to write a headline. And make sure to indent each paragraph.

If your release is longer than one page, center "(MORE)" at the bottom of the first page, "Festival — 1st ad," for instance, at the top left of the second page, and "##" on the last page of the release to signal the end of your copy.

Before you photocopy the required number of releases you'll be sending out, read the story over again, checking for spelling, accuracy and to see if it "reads" like a newspaper story.

The release is an appropriate format for promotion on events, activities, election of new officers and other straight, factual news for which there is little likelihood or necessity for a reporter to gather additional information.

While it may be rewritten or shortened by editors to conform to their styles and space limitations, the release should carry all of the information to tell the story in as close to journalistic style as possible.

Photo Captions

Releases can be sent by themselves, or along with photos and captions.

With the Gay '90s festival, much of its allure would be visual. You could stage a picture of several of the involved people, dressed in period costumes and enacting some event that is planned for the festival.

You should send newspapers 8" × 10" or 5" × 7" black and white photos (most mass media do not accept color or Polaroid pictures), with a short caption explaining the photo, typed on white paper and affixed to the bottom of the photo. The caption could be taped or lightly glued to the back of the photo. Never, of course, affix anything to the face of the picture.

Photo and captions can be sent along with news releases or alone. A stiff piece of cardboard should accompany the photo so it won't be damaged in the mail.

Deadlines

Nobody is going to "stop the presses" for your news release or photo/caption release. It's up to you to get it to the newspapers in enough time for them to consider the story and to find a place for it in the paper if it merits it.

With the papers important to your group, find out what the deadlines are. With the weekly newspapers, Monday morning is often the cutoff time. If you're mailing the release, it would be good practice to get it in Thursday's mail to ensure its receipt at the paper by Monday morning at the latest.

With daily newspapers, if the release could run any day of the week, send it out when you mail your releases to the weeklies. If it has to run a certain day, get it to the paper first thing the morning or afternoon prior to the day you want it to run, or better yet, the day before that.

Address the envelope to the person you want to see the release. Call all media you are interested in and ask for the name of the editor you wish to mail to. Make sure you have the correct spelling for names. A good rule of thumb, if you're not sure someone is still in the job, is to call before you send the release to check with the switchboard operator.

Feature Solicitations

News releases and photo/captions are only two devices to secure media attention. If an event or association program merits it, you also should be attempting to secure feature coverage: newspaper features, columns, "soft news" TV coverage and talk show appearances on radio and television.

The best way to secure this kind of coverage is simply to write a letter to the appropriate editor, columnists, assignment editor or producer describing why your event or program would make an interesting feature, column or talk show discussion.

Such a letter is generally confined to one page. The letter should be written in a conversational tone, but very much in the style of a newspaper feature article. There is a little more emotion or writing flair that can legitimately be displayed in this kind of letter but, of course, you have to be careful not to go overboard.

If your judgment of what you're "selling" is good and the letter is compellingly written, you will get phone responses from editors who agree that an interview would be interesting.

If you approached ten editors and producers with letters, and two responded, you may decide a follow-up phone call to those who didn't respond might generate additional stories or interviews. . .and it often does.

Staged Events

Generally, you are inviting embarrassment and disappointment if you call a news conference or stage a strictly promotional event.

In the case of the festival, a clever stunt the day prior to the festival could be used to lure newspaper photographers and television crews to give some advance exposure to the event. You want to use the media to help draw people to the festival, so most of your publicity would have to precede the day. But the advance stunt would have to be almost perfect to generate this kind of coverage. It would also have to be very visual.

The news conference should be used only for major announcements.

With either stunts or news conferences, invite the media by letter and then follow up with phone calls the morning of or afternoon prior to the event. Ask whether your event has made the media outlet's "assignment calendar" for that day. Even if it has, you can't be sure media representatives will be able to come since news may divert them to other events of greater importance. That phone call also can be used to determine if they plan to cover the event itself.

Public Service Announcements

Another often-overlooked vehicle for promoting an event is the radio and television public service announcement. By law, broadcast outlets must make PSA time available for nonprofit groups.

In essence, PSAs are commercials that don't have to be paid for. These "advertisements" typically run 10, 15, 20 or 30 seconds. They should be typed, double-spaced, on white paper and photocopied onto your stationery or other white paper, much like a news release. If they were photocopied onto white paper, the name, address and the name of a contact person and phone number would have to be typed in the upper left-hand corner of the page. Centered above the PSA copy should be a line bearing this kind of information: "30-SEC. PSA/For use through Saturday, Aug. 18."

A month and a half to two months prior to your event, you could write three public service announcements, for instance, a 10-, 20- and a 30-second "spot," as they are called. Three spots give the public service director a choice of length and information about your event.

You can tell if you're close to these time lengths by reading the spot aloud while timing it. But since your PSA will be read by broadcasters on the air, their reading speeds will vary. The challenge to you is just to try to be close.

You should make enough copies of your three spots to send to public service directors at every radio and television station. Some will use the spots; most will not. Just as with news releases, every non-profit group in town is competing for limited amounts of public service time.

Public service directors are likely to prefer PSAs that are presented in an easy-to-use format, are of compelling subject matter to a wide range of people and are interesting and well written.

They also have deadlines. Many schedule PSAs a month at a time. So if you want yours aired, get it to the stations at least a month in advance of the date.

With television stations, such "live" copy PSAs are acceptable, but their prospects for getting played are enhanced if they are accompanied with a color board, art or photo slide.

In making the slide, mount the original art horizontally on a 14-inch by 11-inch art board, confining the art to the center 11 by 9-1/2 inches, so that when it is made into the slide, with "air" around its perimeter, its dimensions match those of the television screen when filmed at the TV station. If you need help making the slide, one of the television public service directors may be willing to assist you.

Additional Considerations

What's been outlined here is a "grab bag" of communication vehicles that can be drawn on as an event, activity or announcement merits.

At times, you would want to use all of these approaches to try to generate a full range of media exposure.

But the key to all of them is judgment. Before you decide to seek mass media exposure, ask these questions:

1. Does what we're doing merit this kind of exposure?
2. Is our presentation professional?
3. Are we being reasonable in our requests?
4. Are we being professional and courteous in our dealings with media people who, themselves, may not be treating us in the same manner; and are we distributing our materials in sufficient time to meet media deadlines?

And, most important,

5. Are others going to be interested in what we have to say?

III: Postscript

The message of this guidebook is:

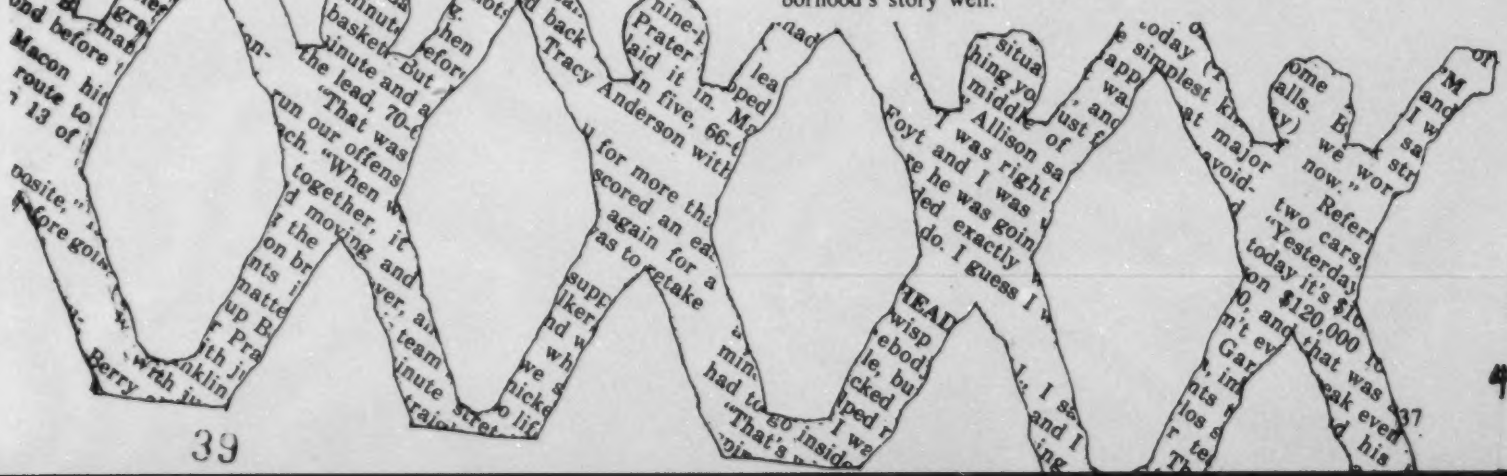
WHEN
Regularly. . .and more frequently whenever a special need exists.

WHAT
Most of all, information; once in a while a request for help.

HOW
In many different ways: face-to-face, or via phone calls, personal correspondence, brochures, T-shirts, logos, posters, ads, newsletters, fliers, newspaper articles, radio or television, speeches, surveys, bumper stickers, community events or whatever other format can be devised.

WHY
So that things good for the neighborhood can happen.

We wish you Effective Communications and hope this guidebook helps you to accomplish your goal: to tell the neighborhood's story well.



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41